Dixie Dixit: New Trends with Technology
Gamification: What, why, and how

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Gamification is becoming an increasingly popular concept, both in the business world and in educational contexts. In this column, I will define gamification and give examples of how it is being used nowadays, in the two contexts mentioned above. In the next issue, I will talk about how gamification is being used in the specific context of language learning and teaching. If any readers are interested in applying gamified elements to their own classes, I would ask them to send me an email and we could have a third column with activities and suggestions. Likewise, if anyone is already doing gamification, and you would like to share ideas, send them to me and I can include them in a third column.

So, let's begin. Gamification has been defined as the application of game-like elements to non-gaming contexts (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). If you have a frequent-flyer program with an airline, or if you get points for using your credit card, then you are already familiar with the concept of gamification: you get a reward or a prize for doing something. What is the point of offering the user these rewards? Airlines and credit cards get you to use their services, rather than their competitors'. In other words, these game-like elements motivate the user to do something.

This "something" can be to buy a product or use a service, but it is not necessarily so. Are you familiar with Yahoo Answers (https://answers.yahoo.com)? You ask and answer questions about virtually anything, and the online community votes for the "best" answers, yet not necessarily the correct answer. By answering and getting voted as best, you advance in levels. Here, there is no tangible reward: only the intrinsic motivation of advancing and being considered "the best" at something. Receiving rewards and advancing in levels are two examples of game elements being applied in non-game situations.

Interesting uses of gamification are being developed by The Fun Theory, an initiative of Volkswagen. Their webpage states: "This site is dedicated to the thought that something as simple as fun is the easiest way to change people's behaviour for the better. Be it for yourself, for the environment, or for something entirely different, the only thing that matters is that it's change for the better" (www.Thefuntheory.com). The site includes several videos with examples, which I invite you to check out. In one, cameras show people leaving a subway station via either a staircase or an escalator which are side by side. Most people take the escalator. Then, we see workers installing on the staircase what appear to be piano keys, wired for sound. As people use the stairs, the "keys" play music. The result is that 66% more people than normal select the stairs. In this case, gamification is not being applied in a business context, but in a social one, with the intention of motivating people to do more physical activity.

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Gamification appeals to important human motivators: the desire to have fun, to compete against others, and to gain rewards. In the classroom, all of these can mean increased student engagement.

Now, let's take a look at how gamification is being used in educational contexts. It is being used in universities (Fitz-Walter, Tjondronegoro, & Wyeth, 2011), in elementary school (Chen, 2014), in e-learning (Muntean. 2011), to teach biochemistry (Crisp, 2014), languages (Plenda, 2014), history (Rubio, 2014), computer science (Domínguez et al., 2013), and many more areas.

Gamification in the classroom is more than just playing games. In a gamified class, students may be asked to take on certain roles, or to complete challenges. Perhaps they need to collect objects or items of information, or solve a puzzle. They receive points, badges, or other rewards for successful completion of their tasks. Frequently, there is leaderboard, where everyone can see who is doing best in the course. One classic example is the business simulation course, where students receive fake "money" to invest in the stock market. They learn the basics of investment while making or losing fake fortune.

With a little imagination, almost any game can be adapted to the teaching-learning context, but the main idea is this: *we are not just adding games*; *the whole course is a game.*

So, we have seen what gamification is, how it is being used in business or social contexts, and how it is being applied in education. In next issue's column, I will discuss how language learning is being gamified. And remember, if you are interested in a third column, with some classroom activities, write to me: jsantana@up.edu.mx and put *Gamification* in the subject line.

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